



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## VII.—THE BALLAD OF *THE BITTER WITHY*.

It is so unusual a circumstance at this late day for an entirely new English ballad to come to light that we are justified in hailing its appearance as an event of general interest to the world of English scholarship. From the completion of Professor Child's magnificent work up to the present no ballad has been discovered,<sup>1</sup> which would merit insertion under a new title in that corpus. Variants of ballads already known continue to be unearthed with gratifying frequency, but so well did the great collector glean the field that it can seldom fall to the lot of any follower to bring to light a new specimen. The honor due for such a discovery belongs, however, to Mr. Frank Sidgwick, who printed in 1905 a ballad called *The Withies*, or *The Bitter Withy* in *Notes and Queries*.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the very rarity of the treasure makes the question of its genuineness an important one, and every such find should be submitted to all possible tests before it is accepted as belonging to the family of traditional ballads. The tests by which it must be judged, I take it, are three. The first is purely personal, the critical sense of the scholar who has learned by long-continued and careful study to distinguish the false from the true, to separate the chaff from the wheat. The second is the external evidence with refer-

<sup>1</sup> H. Hecht in his survey of recent ballad literature, *Engl. Stud.*, xxxvi, 371, says: "Was seitdem noch ergänzend gefunden wurde, ist geringfügig und betrifft in keinem fälle etwa ein bei Child nicht vertretenes stück." Add to the literature mentioned, Belden, *Mod. Phil.*, II, 301-305; F. Sidgwick, *Popular Ballads of the Olden Time*.

<sup>2</sup> Series 10, IV, 84 f, July, 1905. This version was reprinted by Gummere, *The Popular Ballad*, 1907, pp. 228, 229.

ence to the circumstances of discovery, whether the collector or collectors can be trusted. The third is the source of the material, whether the narrative is the product of tradition or of some clever inventor. That ballads of very various degrees of worth may be regarded as valuable to the study of the type is evidenced by comparing the contents of the last two volumes of Child with the earlier ones. Yet the better a ballad comes out when submitted to the tests above mentioned, the more precious must it appear. According to all three of these standards of judgment *The Bitter Withy* is genuine, as we shall see.

Mr. Sidgwick's version, which I shall call I, runs as follows:

- I. As it fell out on a Holy day,  
The drops of rain did fall, did fall,  
Our Saviour asked leave of His mother Mary  
If He might go play at ball.
- II. "To play at ball, my own dear Son,  
It's time You was going or gone,  
But be sure let me hear no complaint of You  
At night when You do come home."
- III. It was upling scorn and downling scorn,  
Oh, there He met three jolly jerdins:  
Oh, there He asked the three jolly jerdins  
If they would go play at ball.
- IV. "Oh, we are lords' and ladies' sons,  
Born in bower or in hall,  
And You are but some poor maid's child  
Born'd in an ox's stall."
- V. "If you are lords' and ladies' sons,  
Born'd in bower or in hall,  
Then at the very last I'll make it appear  
That I am above you all."
- VI. Our Saviour built a bridge with the beams of the sun,  
And over He gone, He gone He,

And after followed the three jolly jerdins,  
And drowneded they were all three.

VII. It was upling scorn and downling scorn,  
The mothers of them did whoop and call,  
Crying out, "Mary mild, call home your Child,  
For ours are drowneded all."

VIII. Mary mild, Mary mild, called home her Child,  
And laid our Saviour across her knee,  
And with a whole handful of bitter withy  
She gave Him slashes three.

IX. Then He says to His Mother, "Oh! the withy, oh!  
the withy,  
The bitter withy that causes me to smart, to smart,  
Oh! the withy it shall be the very first tree  
That perishes at the heart."

A contributor to *Notes and Queries* in 1868<sup>1</sup> gave some fragments of a second version, which I shall call II. The correspondent wrote:

"I have lately heard sung a Christmas carol commencing—

'It happened on a certain day  
The snow from heaven did fall:  
Sweet Jesus asked his mother dear  
To let him go to the ball."

"It goes on to relate his meeting with virgins three who scornfully refused to let him play at ball with them, and whom he drowned in the sea by leading them over a bridge made of sunbeams. For this act he receives from his mother slashes three from a withy tree, and exclaims—

'Cursed shall be the withy, withy tree,  
For causing me to smart;  
And it shall be the very first tree  
That shall perish at the heart.'"

<sup>1</sup> Series 4, I, 53.

Two further versions of the ballad have up to the present been discovered.<sup>1</sup> The first has been printed entire in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*<sup>2</sup> by the editor, Miss Lucy E. Broadwood.

## III.

## OUR SAVIOUR TARRIED OUT.

Our Saviour tarried out on a high holiday,  
Some drops of rain did fall, did fall,  
Our Saviour asked leave of his mother Mary,  
Might He go play at the ball.

"To play at the ball, my own dearest son,  
It is time you're going or gone, or gone,  
And its never let me hear of your ill-doing  
At night when you don't come home."

It was up the hall, it was down the hall,  
Our Saviour he did run, did run,  
As our Saviour he was a-running for to play at the ball,  
He met three jolly jolly dons.

"Well met, well met, you three jolly dons,  
Well met, well met," said he,  
And its which of you three jolly, jolly dons,  
Will play at the ball with me?"

Our Saviour built a bridge by the beams of the sun,  
And 'twas over the bridge went he, went he,  
And the dons they went a-following after he,  
And they got drowned all three.

"Oh mother, dear mother, don't scold on your son,  
For 'twas over the bridge went he, went he,  
And the dons they went a-following after he,  
And they got drowned all three."

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sidgwick has had communicated to him a fifth text from Bidford, near Stratford-on-Avon. I have not seen this but am informed that it reads "lance" instead of "bridge" and "jordans" instead of "jerdins."

<sup>2</sup> No. 8, 1906, II, 205, 206.

She gathered an armful of small withys  
 And laid him across her knee, her knee,  
 And with that armful of small withys  
 She gave him lashes three.

“O the withy, the withy, the bitter withy,  
 That has caused me to smart, to smart,  
 And the withy it shall be and the very first tree,  
 Shall perish all at the heart.”

The last version has not yet been printed *in extenso*, though the three closing stanzas appeared in the ninth number of the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*.<sup>1</sup> There are a few discrepancies between the stanzas as there quoted and as they appear in the complete version, communicated by the lady who noted it, Mrs. Leather of Weobley, to Mr. Sidgwick. Through the kindness of the latter I am able to give the entire poem.

## IV.

## THE SALLY TWIGS, OR THE BITTER WITHY.

As it fell out on a high holiday,  
 When drop of rain did fall,  
 Jesus asked His Mother Mary,  
 If He should go and play at the ball.

‘To play at the ball, my own dear Son,  
 It’s time you’re goin’ or gone;  
 But let me hear of no complaints,  
 At night when you come home.’

(The next verse is unfortunately forgotten. Our Lord meets three children who revile and despise Him. They say:—)

‘And we are lords and ladies sons,  
 And born in bowers all;  
 And thou art but a poor maid’s Son,  
 Born in an oxen’s stall.’

<sup>1</sup> II, 302. Noted by Miss Broadwood.

'If you are lords and ladies sons,  
And born in bowers all,  
I'll let you know at the latter end  
That I am above you all.'

And Jesus made a bridge of the beams of the sun,  
And over the sea went He;  
And there followed after the three jolly Jorrans,  
And He drowned the three, all three.

And Mary Mild called home her Child,  
And laid Him across her knee,  
And with three twigs of the bitter withy  
She gave Him thrashes three.

---

'The bitter withy, the bitter withy,  
Which made my back to smart,  
It shall be the very first tree  
To wither and decay at the heart.'

To the elucidation of certain dark words and phrases in the ballad I am unable to give much help. Most difficult is the phrase "jolly jerdins," as it appears in I. In II this is transformed into "virgins," in III into "jolly dons," and in IV into "jolly Jorrans." The occurrence of "virgins" in II led Mr. Sidgwick to conjecture that "jerdins" might be a corruption of that word. But this evasion of the difficulty seems to me impossible for two reasons: first, because a study of the legendary material will show that all forms of the phrase indicate the children, who were the playmates of Christ, and because in the ballad there is marked emphasis upon the repeated "lords' and ladies' sons; and, secondly, because it is always unlikely that a common word has been changed for a rare one. The latter reason makes it improbable that "children" gave rise to "jerdins" and "jorrans," while

“dons” seems to be a case of folk etymology. The words “upling” and “downling” in the line “It was upling scorn and downling scorn,” though unregistered words, are clear enough in meaning from the context, and preferable to “It was up the hall, it was down the hall” of III.

With the four versions of *The Bitter Withy* before us we may now apply to the ballad the tests of authenticity referred to above. As to the first, I shall simply say that the greatest living critic of English popular poetry, Professor Gummere, regards the ballad as genuine of its sort.<sup>1</sup> In such matters, where nicely balanced acumen is so necessary to detect spurious phrases and false notes, an appeal to authority is not only wise but inevitable; yet all students of the ballad will agree, I think, that if an imitation this is marvellously well done.

The excellent pedigree of our specimens, however, makes conscious imitation quite impossible and thus establishes the ballad according to the second test. The fragments printed in 1868 were taken down from memory after hearing the poem sung. With reference to version I, Mr. Sidgwick says:<sup>2</sup> “The following version was communicated on 31 December, 1888, by Mr. Henry Ellershaw, Jun., of Rotherham, in a letter to Mr. A. H. Bullen (shortly after the publication of the latter’s ‘Songs and Carols’), who has given me permission to contribute a copy. It was taken down verbatim as sung by an old Herefordshire man of about seventy (in 1888), who learnt it from his grandmother.”

Version III was sung at Wimbledon in September, 1905, by a Mr. Hunt, a native of Sussex, who learned it at home. The words were taken down by Miss Lucy E.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Popular Ballad*, 1907, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Notes and Queries*, place cited.



Broadwood and the music transcribed by Mr. R. Vaughan Williams. Version IV was noted by Mrs. E. M. Leather, Castle House, Weobley, as sung in Herefordshire in 1904.<sup>1</sup> We thus have two versions from Herefordshire and one from Sussex, aside from the fragment of uncertain derivation. Version I, moreover, carries the evidence for the knowledge of the ballad back to about the end of the eighteenth century, which is sufficiently remote to make a longer course of tradition almost inevitable.

To this matter of tradition, the third test of authenticity, we must now turn. Of itself the fact that the material, out of which a ballad has been fashioned, has been known to the learned or even to the unlearned for some centuries does not give clear proof that the ballad is genuine. It would be quite possible for a modern imitator to turn a tradition of most venerable antiquity into a poem that would not deceive the veriest tyro in balladry. Without other tests, the study of sources is about as useless to investigation of this kind as anything that could possibly be imagined. From this point of view it makes no difference whether the events happened the day before the ballad was made, or a thousand years before, or never at all. As long as they actually belong to the stock of popular knowledge, their provenance is of no consequence. At the same time, when a ballad treats a subject which has as basis a legend or a folk-tale, it is of considerable value to show the previous existence of the story and to trace its development. Contributory evidence of authenticity may thus be found. From another point of view, moreover, every systematic study of a motive has its warrant.

To find the first suggestion of the events narrated in *The Bitter Withy* it is necessary to go back to the early ver-

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, II, 302.

sions of the apocryphal gospels, though not until after the eleventh century A. D. do they begin to take form.

In the *Evangelium Thomae*,<sup>1</sup> the *Pseudo-Matthew*,<sup>2</sup> the *Evangelium Infantiae Arabicum*,<sup>3</sup> and the Syriac texts of the gospels<sup>4</sup> there is a tale, which must first be discussed. The *Gospel of Thomas* is the earliest of these books, a Gnostic work dating from the middle of the second century, according to Reinsch.<sup>5</sup> It is only slightly later than the *Protevangeliium Jacobi*, and gives a more expanded account of the fabulous history of Christ's childhood. Considerably later were written the Arabian gospel and the *Pseudo-Matthew*, the latter probably soon after the middle of the fifth century, as the ascetic and monastic tone adopted by the author bears witness.<sup>6</sup> The date of the Syriac texts has not been accurately ascertained, but "there is no doubt," to quote their learned editor, "that the principal materials for the construction of the narrative were collected before the end of the fourth century."<sup>7</sup>

The version of the *Pseudo-Matthew*, because of its influence on later forms of the legend, may be taken as the basis of comparison:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Graece* A, cap. ix, Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 1853, p. 142; *Graece* B, cap. viii, Tischendorf, p. 153; *Latinum*, cap. vii, Tischendorf, pp. 164 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cap. xxxii, Tischendorf, pp. 96 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cap. xlv, Tischendorf, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> Budge, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary—The Syriac Texts edited with English Translations*, 1899, pp. 81 f. of *Translations*.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Pseudo-Evangelien von Jesu und Maria's Kindheit in der romanischen und germanischen Literatur*, 1879, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> See Reinsch, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Budge, p. x.

<sup>8</sup> Tischendorf, pp. 96 f. Found without essential changes in *Evangelium Thomae*, *Graece* A, Tischendorf, p. 142; *Graece* B, Tischendorf, p. 153; *Latinum*, Tischendorf, pp. 164-165; *Evangelium Infantiae Arabicum*, Tischendorf, p. 197.

“Post haec abierunt inde Ioseph et Maria cum Iesu in civitatem Nazareth; et erat ibi cum parentibus suis. Et cum esset ibi una sabbati, dum Iesus luderet cum infantibus in solario cuiusdam domus, contigit ut quidam de infantibus alium depelleret de solario in terram, et mortuus est. Et cum non vidissent parentes mortui, clamabant contra Ioseph et Mariam dicentes Filius vester filium nostrum misit in terram, et mortuus est. Iesus vero tacebat et nihil eis respondebat. Venerunt autem festinantes Ioseph et Maria ad Iesum, et rogabat mater sua dicens Domine mi, dic mihi si tu misisti eum in terram. Et statim descendit Iesus de solario in terram et vocavit puerum per nomen suum Zeno. Et respondit ei Domine. Dixitque illi Iesus Num ego praecipitavi te in terram de solario? At ille dixit Non, domine. Et mirati sunt parentes pueri qui fuerat mortuus, et honorabant Iesum super facto signo. Et abierunt inde Ioseph et Maria cum Iesu in Iericho.”

In the chapter next following this narrative in the *Pseudo-Matthew*<sup>1</sup> occurs another tale, which is likewise found without substantial changes in the other gospels mentioned above.<sup>2</sup>

“Erat autem Iesus annorum sex, et misit illum mater sua cum hydria ad fontem haurire aquam cum infantibus. Et contigit postquam hausit aquam, ut quidam ex infantibus impegerit eum et conquasseraverit hydriam et fregerit eam. At Iesus expandit pallium quo utebatur, et suscepit in pallio suo tantum aquae quantum erat in hydria, et portavit eam matri suae. At illa videns

<sup>1</sup> Cap. xxxiii, Tischendorf, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelium Thomae, Graece* A, cap. xi, Tischendorf, p. 143; *Graece* B, cap. x, Tischendorf, p. 154; *Latinum*, cap. ix, Tischendorf, p. 165; *Evangelium Infantiae Arabicum*, cap. xlv, Tischendorf, p. 197; Budge, p. 75.

mirabatur, et cogitabat intra se, et condebat omnia haec in corde suo."

In addition to these two stories of Zeno's fatal fall and the broken jug there is found in the Laurentian Codex <sup>1</sup> of the *Pseudo-Matthew*, which was written after the eleventh century Vatican text printed by Tischendorf, another fable of more direct importance for our study. It runs: "Et cum Iesus cum aliis infantulis super radios solis <sup>2</sup> ubique plures ascenderet et sederet, multique simili modo facere coeperunt, praecipitabantur et eorum crura frangebantur et brachia. Sed dominus Iesus sanabat omnes." This appears to be the earliest suggestion in the legend of the miracle which forms the essential feature of our ballad.

These three stories are, as one would expect, repeated in later accounts of the childhood without material alteration. Without being altogether constant in their appearance, they occur with considerable frequency both in Latin and in vernacular versions. By the thirteenth century, however, the tendency to expand and embellish narrative of whatever sort had resulted in the addition of three more tales pretty closely allied to these in character and obviously their offspring.

The book known as *De Infantia Salvatoris*, which is found in several manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries <sup>3</sup> has the story of Zeno's fall (here called Synoe) and of the unsuccessful attempt of the children to

<sup>1</sup> Inserted in cap. xxxvii. Printed by Tischendorf in a note on p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> The editor prints "solus (sic, nisi fallor)," but the emendation is, of course, necessary, as Reinsch notes, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> See Reinsch, p. 7. He dates but one, ms. Bib. Nat. lat. 11867, which he ascribes to the thirteenth century. mss. Harl. 3185 and Harl. 3199, in the British Museum, are of the fourteenth.

imitate Jesus' example in sitting on the sunbeam; and it adds two more stories. I shall mention all of them in the order of the text. (1) A certain boy, whose father had tried unsuccessfully to keep him out of the company of Jesus, made one of a troop that went "usque in campum Sichar." The father followed, "iratusque arripuit fustem, ut Jhesum percuteret, et insecutus est Jhesum usque ad montem, cui subjacet planicies fabae collateralis, et declinavit. Jhesus Christus a furore saltum fecit a montibus supercilio usque ad locum, qui distat a monte, quantum archus jacet sagittam. Quod volentes alii pueri simili saltu sequi ruentes praecipites fregerunt crura, brachia et colla. Facta autem super hoc gravi querimonia coram Maria et Joseph, sanavit eos omnes Jhesus Christus et reddidit validiores."<sup>1</sup> (2) The story of how Jesus sat on the sunbeam is given with more detail than in the Laurentian manuscript. For reasons that will later appear, I quote the setting. "Una autem die tempore hiemali, cum sol in sua virtute clarus radiaret, extendit se radius solaris attingens a fenestra in parietem in domo Joseph. Ubi cum luderent cum Jhesu contribules pueri vicinorum per domum discurrentes, ascendit Jhesus Christus radium solis, et positus super eum vestimentis suis sedebat quasi super trabem firmissimum."<sup>2</sup> (3) The story of Zeno is then given.<sup>3</sup> (4) Jesus went with his comrades to a fountain to get water. While returning, he struck his jar against a rock by the wayside. Pleased with the sound produced, the others "similiter fecerunt de suis et fregit unusquisque amphoram suam effusa aqua, postquam ierant. Orto autem super hoc tumultu et querimonia, collegit Jhesus Christus fragmenta et vasa omnia reintegrat; et cuncto libero vas suum cum aqua restituit."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Reinsch, p. 9.<sup>2</sup> See Reinsch, p. 10.<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Reinsch, pp. 11 f.<sup>4</sup> Reinsch, p. 12.

The first of these tales, that of leaping from the hill, seems to be a variation of the story of Zeno in that it concerns the healing of children injured while at play. Whether it had any being outside this legendary cycle, and whether it was used in this connection earlier than by the writer of *De Infantia Salvatoris*, I am unable to say.<sup>1</sup> The fourth tale, that of repairing the water jar, is certainly a mere variant of the earlier story about carrying water in a mantle. However, both stories reappear in other works from this time forward.

The *Narrationes de Vita et Conversatione Beatae Mariae Virginis*,<sup>2</sup> which appears to be only a little later<sup>3</sup> than the work just mentioned, gives the story of Zeno<sup>4</sup> and a new version of the broken water pot. The latter version runs: "Legitur eciam ibi quod dum Iesus quandque matri aquam de fonte ferret, super solis radium suspendit uasculum et postse radium sicut funem cum uasculo traxit."<sup>5</sup> For both of these *De Infantia Salvatoris* is named as authority. Though the latter does not contain the second tale, as far as study of the manuscripts up to the present time has shown, it is possible that some form of the work was really the source from which the writer of these *Narrationes* worked. In any case, wherever the tale started, it is obviously nothing more than an interesting combination of

<sup>1</sup> Not improbably the story finds its ultimate suggestion in the *Song of Songs* 2. 8; "ecce iste venit saliens in montibus, transiliens colles." This passage was interpreted as applying to Christ at least as early as the time of Ambrose. See Cook, *Philologische Studien, Festgabe für Eduard Sievers*, 1896, pp. 27-29, and *The Christ of Cynewulf*, 1900, p. 143, for examples of this mystical use.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. O. Schade, *Narrationes—ex codici Gissenst*, 1870.

<sup>3</sup> Schade, p. 3, dates the manuscript from the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> Cap. xlii, Schade, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Cap. xliii, Schade, p. 21.

ideas taken from the miracles of sitting on the sunbeam and of repairing or using a substitute for a broken jug.

The *Vita Beate Virginis Marie et Salvatoris Rhythmica*,<sup>1</sup> which has been ascribed by its editor, though doubtfully, to the first half of the thirteenth century,<sup>2</sup> contains three of the six tales that have now come before us. It tells (vv. 2684-2717) how Jesus collected the water from the broken pitcher in his mantle, and proceeds (vv. 2718-2763) with the story of Zeno. The fact that the scene of the boy's fall is placed at a cliff like that described in the story of Christ's leap indicates that the writer either knew the *De Infantia Salvatoris* or some similar work. The two stories are certainly confused by him. A little further on (vv. 2780-2783) he gives the brief account of suspending the water pot on the sunbeam in words almost precisely the same as those of the *Narrationes* mentioned above, only turning them into verse. It is impossible to say whether he drew on that work directly, but it seems likely that such was the case.

There remains to be considered one Latin version of the *Childhood*, which is of some interest as the first account printed in England, though it is later than the mediæval versions in the vernacular. This is the prose *Infantia Salvatoris*, which was published at Turin<sup>3</sup> in 1476 or 1477 and in England by Caxton. The latter text, known only through a single example at Göttingen,<sup>4</sup> contains three of our six tales: Zeno,<sup>5</sup> the jar suspended on the sunbeam,<sup>6</sup> and the leap.<sup>7</sup> The last differs from the version of

<sup>1</sup>Ed. A. Vögtlin, *Vita Beata Virginis Marie et Salvatoris Rhythmica* (Bibl. des litt. Vereins in Stuttgart, 180), 1888.

<sup>2</sup>P. 3.

<sup>3</sup>See Reinsch, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ed. F. Holthausen, *Infantia Salvatoris*, 1891. It is without date.

<sup>5</sup>Cap. xx.

<sup>6</sup>Cap. xxii.

<sup>7</sup>Cap. xxix.

*De Infantia* in making Jesus encourage the other boys to follow Him after He had leaped from hill to hill. Caxton's text is throughout amplified.

In Germany tradition seems to have dealt gingerly with these grotesques. The *Vita Rhythmica* was translated by Walther von Rheinau<sup>1</sup> with intelligence, and a *Kindheit Jesu* by Konrad von Fussesbrunnen<sup>2</sup> has the incident of carrying water in the mantle (vv. 2616-2634) and of Zeno's fall (vv. 2667-2698), both in conventional form. Whether any Italian or Spanish works contain the miracles I cannot at present state. In France they seem to have found much greater favor than in Germany, though the dearth of published texts of the various *Enfances* makes it difficult to trace their course. The well-known Provençal poem edited by Bartsch<sup>3</sup> relates only two of the stories,—how Christ sat on the sunbeam<sup>4</sup> and how He healed Zeno.<sup>5</sup> The former follows the account in *De Infantia Salvatoris* rather than that of the Laurentian *Pseudo-Matthew*, in which it agrees with the English versions soon to be mentioned. A second Provençal text, from the fourteenth century, known to us only through Suchier's analysis<sup>6</sup> based on Raynouard's quotations in his *Lexique roman*, tells the story of Zeno. In the French of the North appears a thirteenth century work, *La vie nostre dame et la passion de nostre seigneur*,<sup>7</sup> which con-

<sup>1</sup> Ed. A. von Keller, 1849-1855.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. J. Feifalik, 1859, and K. Kochendörffer, *Quellen und Forschungen*, 43 (1881). Konrad wrote early in the thirteenth century, says Kochendörffer, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Denkmäler der provenzalischen Litteratur*, 1856 (Bibl. des litt. Vereins in Stuttgart, 39). The MSS. are of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, according to Suchier, *Zts. f. rom. Phil.*, VIII, 523.

<sup>4</sup> Bartsch, pp. 279-281.

<sup>5</sup> Bartsch, pp. 287-291.

<sup>6</sup> *Zts. f. rom. Phil.*, VIII, 534.

<sup>7</sup> See Reinsch, p. 42, for date and MSS.



tains the story of the broken jug, which Jesus repaired.<sup>1</sup> The *Enfance* most important for our study, however, has not yet been either printed or adequately analyzed. It is found in two redactions, from the former of which, in the opinion of M. Paul Meyer,<sup>2</sup> the first of the English poems to be mentioned was probably a translation.

This work, which is found in ms. Laud 108,<sup>3</sup> contains all six of the stories which we have been considering, and in the following order: (1) the leap from hill to hill (vv. 557-612), (2) the repairing of the broken jug (vv. 613-638), (3) the suspension of the jug on the sun ray (vv. 639-678), (4) Zeno (vv. 871-946), (5) the gathering up of the spilled water (vv. 947-984), and (6) how Jesus sat on the sunbeam (vv. 1051-1129). M. Meyer's discovery of the source for this poem naturally throws out of court the previous statement of its editor that it was taken from a Latin original.<sup>4</sup> It explains, however, the fact noted by him<sup>5</sup> that the percentage of French derivatives is extraordinarily large. Until the French texts are printed,<sup>6</sup> we must take for granted that the English work fairly represents one or another redaction of the poem indicated and attribute to the original author rather than to the South-English translator of about 1300 the arrangement and form of the miracles mentioned above.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reinsch, pp. 71-73.

<sup>2</sup> See P. Meyer, *Romania*, XVIII, 128 ff. The mss. of (1) are Grenoble 1137 and Didot; of (2) Oxford Selden supra 38 and Cambridge Gg 1. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, 1875, pp. 3-61.

<sup>4</sup> Horstmann, p. xli.

<sup>5</sup> P. xlii.

<sup>6</sup> The analysis of ms. Grenoble given by Bonnard, *Les traductions de la bible en vers français*, 1884, pp. 181-193, leaves out (3) and (5), but apparently the latter is merely illegible in the ms. (See p. 187), while the latter may have been passed over in the summary.

<sup>7</sup> Meyer's belief that the redaction of mss. Grenoble and Didot rather than of mss. Selden and Cambridge is the original of the Middle

It will be noted that here for the first time all of the tales are given in a single work. Their order is significant, it seems to me, with reference to the sources which the author used. First come the two miracles which are first found in *De Infantia Salvatoris*, secondly the one added in the Giessen *Narrationes*,<sup>1</sup> and finally after nearly two hundred lines the original three in the order of the Laurentian *Pseudo-Matthew*. It seems clear that the French writer had before him some *Childhood* like the *De Infantia* as well as a *Pseudo-Matthew*. However they were brought together, the stories were now united in a single poem and that poem carried into England.

Other evidence of their dissemination in England during the Middle Ages by means of the vernacular is found in an entirely distinct *Childhood*, which has been published from three different manuscripts: ms. Additional 31042,<sup>2</sup> ms. Harl. 2399,<sup>3</sup> and ms. Harl. 3954.<sup>4</sup> All three are redactions of a single work, though they differ considerably in content. Their relationship has been worked out by Dr. Landshoff, whose conclusion that the versions of the

English is open to some doubt for two reasons. The English ms. is at least as early as the French and perhaps older; in several places (vv. 77-80, 159-162, 233-236, etc.) it shows traces of rhymes "quatre à quatre," which Meyer tells us is the form of the second French redaction. The translation is rather clumsily, though vigorously, made. In a great number of instances (see Horstmann, pp. xlii ff.) the rhymes are faulty.

<sup>1</sup>The appearance of this here in conjunction with the other two makes me more inclined to give credence to the ascription of it to *De Infantia* by the compiler of the *Narrationes*. See p. 153 above.

<sup>2</sup>Ed. Horstmann, *Archiv f. d. Stud. d. n. Sprachen*, LXXIV, 327-339. Northern dialect, fifteenth century.

<sup>3</sup>Ed. Horstmann, *Sammlung altenglischer Legenden*, 1878, pp. 111-123. Midland dialect, fifteenth century.

<sup>4</sup>Ed. Horstmann, *Work cited*, pp. 101-110. Midland dialect, fourteenth century.

Harleian manuscripts form a group deriving from a precursor of ms. Additional is certainly justified.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that one of the Midland texts is considerably earlier than the Northern, I believe that the latter is in the dialect of the original English form of the poem<sup>2</sup> and that its content may accordingly be taken with security as representing the original. Like the poem in the Laud manuscript it has all six of the miracles, but it changes the order slightly, placing the story of how Jesus sat on the sunbeam fourth instead of last.<sup>3</sup> Into the form of the stories I need not go further than to state that they show what is witnessed by the work at large, an origin independent of Laud 108.

That these miracles had a considerable vogue in mediæval England is shown clearly enough, I think, by the examples adduced. We have seen how the three tales of *Pseudo-Matthew* were expanded to six by the common process of fictional embroidery, and how the six were spread

<sup>1</sup> H. Landshoff, *Kindheit Jesu, ein englisches Gedicht aus dem 14. Jahrhundert. I. Verhaltnis der Handschriften*, 1889, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Certain rhymes like *Late: mate: sate: satte* (vv. 66-72 of ms. Add.), which are perfect in the Northern dialect, are bungled hopelessly in the Harleian copies. Furthermore, the completer form of the Northern version inclines one to the belief that it better represents the original. Landshoff's summary (pp. 17-33) of places where the Northern version is textually in the right makes the matter clearer.

<sup>3</sup> The stories occur in the texts as follows: (1) The leap, Add. vv. 280-327; Harl. 2399, vv. 277-324; Harl. 3954, vv. 381-486. (2) The jug repaired, Add. vv. 328-341; Harl. 2399, vv. 325-339; Harl. 3954, vv. 345-357. (3) The jug suspended, Add. vv. 342-363; Harl. 2399, vv. 340-360; Harl. 3954, vv. 358-380. (4) Sits on sunbeam, Add. vv. 472-520; Harl. 2399, vv. 453-496. (5) Zeno, Add. vv. 521-572. (6) Collects spilled water, Add. vv. 834-845; Harl. 2399, vv. 755-766.

by vernacular versions in England as well as on the Continent. We may now revert to *The Bitter Withy*.

I have said above<sup>1</sup> that with the entrance of the story of how Jesus sat on the sunbeam the kernel of the legend in its relation to the material of the ballad is to be found. The leap, which was fatally imitated by His playmates, is of scarcely less importance in explaining why He should build a bridge with the beams of the sun; and the further expansion into the tale of the water pot suspended on the sunbeam is not without value. Furthermore, the suggestion of the original *De Infantia*<sup>2</sup> that the ray of the sun extended across the room like a beam, when it was used as a seat, though I have not found it in the vernacular, shows how easily the notion of a bridge could come in. That the playmates of the ballad were drowned instead of killed by fracture is a natural sequence. It will be understood, of course, that I am not seeking to establish anything more than the popular knowledge of the series at an early day on English soil, where they could be used as ballad material. That, it seems to me, has been indicated by the existence of the miracles in a rather crude literary form, frequently copied as we know from the manuscript relations of the Northern *Childhood*, which was clearly made for popular use. It is another case, I believe, of an ecclesiastical legend sifting down to the common people.<sup>3</sup>

Another bit of evidence for the diffusion of the miracles in England was long ago pointed out by Reinhold Köhler.<sup>4</sup> It is found in the chapbook *History of Tom Thumb*, of

<sup>1</sup> P. 151.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> See the author's articles, *Publications of the Mod. Lang. Ass.*, XIX, 335-448 and XX, 529-545.

<sup>4</sup> *Eng. Stud.*, II, 115.

which the earliest edition now known to exist was printed in 1630.<sup>1</sup> I quote a stanza from the reprint by Hazlitt.<sup>2</sup>

Of whom to be reueng'd, he tooke  
 (in mirth and pleasant game)  
 Black pots and glasses, which he hung  
 vpon a bright sunne-beame.  
 The other boyes to doe the like,  
 in pieces broke them quite;  
 For which they were most soundly whipt,  
 Whereat he laught outright.

This curious adaptation of the story of the suspended water pot is valuable for the indirect evidence afforded as to the popularity of these tales.

We have seen that the legend of Christ's relations with His playmates, which we have been studying, was of gradual growth. It is, then, not out of place to inquire whence came the sunbeam in the legend. Dr. Kressner in treating the Provençal versions suggests a parallel, which I am inclined to believe a source. He says: "Man ist versucht, dieses Wunder mit einer im Mittelalter sehr verbreiteten Geschichte zusammen zu bringen, nämlich von einem Diebe, welcher auf einem Mondstrahle von dem Dache eines Hauses in dasselbe hinunter gleiten will und dabei den Hals bricht."<sup>3</sup> This story is found in *Kalila and Dimna* and thus goes back to Sanskrit. I give a summary of the text of John of Capua to show the European form of the tale and print in an appendix a list of versions.

<sup>1</sup> A complete set of the three parts is owned by the Harvard College Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Early Popular Poetry of England*, 1866, II, 180. Reprinted also by Ritson, *Pieces of Ancient Popular Poetry*, 1791, and by Halliwell, *The Metrical History of Tom Thumb the Little*, 1860. The story is retold in prose by Halliwell, *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales*, 1849, pp. 95-100.

<sup>3</sup> *Archiv f. d. Stud. d. n. Sprachen*, LVIII, 296, note.

A thief with certain of his fellows ascended the roof of a rich man's house one night, hoping in that way to gain entrance. The man heard them and told his wife to ask him in a loud voice how he had obtained his wealth. When she had asked him more than once, he responded that he had gained all by skilful theft. On the night of the full moon he would go up on the roof of a house, say "sulem" seven times, embrace a moon ray and be carried safely into the house. After securing his booty he would get away quietly in the same manner. The leader of the robbers waited a few minutes, then tried the ingenious plan to his great discomfort.<sup>1</sup> This story is, of course, absolutely unlike our legend save for the expedient of using the ray of the moon as a means of conveyance; yet when it is considered that the Oriental story was known in Europe before the end of the eleventh century<sup>2</sup> and that the Laurentian ms. of *Pseudo-Matthew* somewhat after that date gives the legend very briefly, it seems probable that the first man to invent the incident of Jesus and the sunbeam knew the earlier tale in some form or other.

The legend, which we have been studying, appears to me to be the central theme of *The Bitter Withy*. I am not disturbed by the leap in the dark required in passing from mediæval versions to the ballad, nor do I think that the features unexplained by the legend are of prime importance. There is first the game of ball and the taunts of the children by which the poem is introduced. References to ball-playing are so frequent in the ballads that this need not be regarded as anything more than a half conventional opening. Read, for example, the first stanza of *Sir Hugh*

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Derenbourg, pp. 24 f.

<sup>2</sup> The translation by Simeon Seth was made towards 1080. See Hervieux, *Les fabulistes latins*, v, 75.

of *Lincoln* and see how closely it is approached by this. Yet that popular tradition in England actually connected the Child Jesus with ball-playing is shown by a reference in the second of the two Middle English poems discussed above. In the story of His wonderful dealings with the dyer it is said, according to MS. Additional, that He

“ . . . went to playe hym at the balle  
With his felawes, walde he noghte lette.”<sup>1</sup>

or as Harl. 2399 puts it,

“ Ande seþen to play hym at þe balle  
Wyth hys felouse he wulde not lete.”<sup>2</sup>

The further picture given in a well-known carol, called *The Holy Well*, of His relations with the children and their taunts furnishes at least an interesting parallel to this part of the ballad story. The carol<sup>3</sup> runs as follows:

As it fell out one May morning,  
And upon one bright holiday,  
Sweet Jesus asked of his dear Mother,  
If he might go to play.

<sup>1</sup> Vv. 672, 673.

<sup>2</sup> Vv. 599, 600.

<sup>3</sup> Printed from W. Sandys, *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern*, 1833, pp. 149-152. Sandys says that he took it from a “popular broadside carol.” Other versions in William Howitt, *Rural Life in England*, 1838, II, 214, 215 (from “a volume of Christmas Carols as sung in the neighborhood of Manchester,” collected by “the late Mrs. Fletcher [Miss Jewsbury]; “Joshua Sylvester,” *A Garland of Christmas Carols*, 1861, pp. 32-35 (from a broadside printed at Gravesend in the eighteenth century, reprinted in *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, II, 303, and with changes in *Ancient Carols* [Shakespeare Head Press Booklets, No. I], 1905, pp. 17-19); and W. H. Husk, *Songs of the Nativity*, pp. 91-94 (from a Gravesend broadside). These versions differ from that of Sandys and from one another in a good many lines.

'To play, to play sweet Jesus shall go,  
And to play, pray get you gone,  
And let me hear of no complaint  
At night when you come home.'

Sweet Jesus went down to yonder town,  
As far as the Holy Well,  
And there did see as fine children  
As any tongue can tell.

He said, 'God bless you every one,  
And your bodies Christ save and see:  
Little children, shall I play with you,  
And you shall play with me.'

But they made answer to him, 'No:'  
They were lords' and ladies' sons;  
And he, the meanest of them all,  
Was but a maiden's child, born in an ox's stall.

Sweet Jesus turned him around,  
And he neither laugh'd nor smil'd,  
But the tears came trickling from his eyes  
Like water from the skies.

Sweet Jesus turned him about,  
To his Mother's dear home went He,  
And said, 'I have been in yonder town,  
As after you may see.

'I have been down in yonder town,  
As far as the Holy Well,  
There did I meet as fine children  
As any tongue can tell.

'I bid God bless them every one,  
And their bodies Christ save and see:  
Little children, shall I play with you,  
And you shall play with me.

'But they made answer to me, No,  
They were lords' and ladies' sons,  
And I, the meanest of them all,  
Was but a maiden's child, born in an ox's stall.'



‘Though you are but a maiden’s child,  
Born in an ox’s stall,  
Thou art the Christ, the King of Heaven,  
And the Saviour of them all.

‘Sweet Jesus, go down to yonder town,  
As far as the Holy Well,  
And take away those sinful souls,  
And dip them deep in hell.’

‘Nay, nay,’ sweet Jesus said,  
‘Nay, nay, that may not be,  
For there are too many sinful souls,  
Crying out for the help of me.’

O then spoke the Angel Gabriel,  
Upon one good Saint Stephen,  
Altho’ you’re but a maiden’s child,  
You are the King of Heaven.

The whole point and force of the ballad is lost in this curiously emasculated text, which appears notwithstanding to be genuinely popular. Presumably the carol derives from the same wave of tradition as the ballad and may be regarded as a variant of it. The introduction of the holy well recalls the story of the broken pitcher, which I have shown to be of some importance in the growth of the legend. It is possible that the tradition gave rise to two ballads, of one of which *The Holy Well* is a debased copy; but, as this explanation would demand as a corollary some confusion of phrase between the two, it seems more likely that we have to do with a single ballad, which in the broad-sides fell on evil days.

After the legend proper come the chastisement and the curse, both of which seem to me features of less importance than the main story. As to the whipping, I know of no reference to it in England. Indeed, in all the versions

of the *Childhood* from both the Continent and England that I have read, the Mother's attitude toward her Son is one of respectful adoration. Mr. Sidgwick, however, has called attention <sup>1</sup> to a note in *Notes and Queries* for 1863,<sup>2</sup> which quotes the following passage from the pen of an English clergyman <sup>3</sup> descriptive of a fresco on the exterior of the west end of a church at Lucca. "Leaving the square at Lucca, which contains the cathedral, I entered a long and narrow street; and when I had traversed it for about half a mile, I suddenly came upon the ancient and massive church of San Martino.—The Virgin is represented inflicting corporal punishment upon the youthful Jesus. She holds a rod in her hand; with the other she holds the garments of the Child. She is in the act of inflicting punishment. The child is in alarm, and its eyes are eagerly directed to St. Anna, the mother of the Virgin, in the background; entreating her intercession to escape the cruel ordeal."<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, in the Old French *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages* (I, vv. 1383-1385) we find Premier Dyable blasphemously remarking of Christ:

"Pour sa mère n'en ose el faire:  
Si lui faisoit riens de contraire,  
Il seroit batuz an retour."<sup>5</sup>

So in a later play of the same series, Deuxiesme Dyable says (xxxvi, vv. 587-589):

<sup>1</sup> *Place cited.*

<sup>2</sup> Third Series, III, 324 f.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. A. Vicary, *Notes of a Residence at Rome in 1846*, by a Protestant Clergyman.

<sup>4</sup> As the cathedral of Lucca is dedicated to St. Martin, it seems certain that the traveler was mistaken in the name of the church.

<sup>5</sup> Ed. Paris and Robert, 1876, I, 49, 50 (*Société des anciens textes.*)

“Et s'il le faisoit, abatuz  
Seroit de sa mère et batuz  
Dessus ses fesses.”<sup>1</sup>

These allusions seem to imply a knowledge on the part of the authors of some such story.

With this evidence, slight as it is, one must regard the chastisement as belonging to the legend, no matter how it came to be there. What more natural than that it should be seized upon by the ballad-maker or balladmakers as a fitting end to the story? The ballad requires a catastrophe,—and here you have it. It is not humorous. It is rather most grave and sober and unsmiling. The thing could not be done at all except by the sublime unconsciousness of a childlike mind, and the perfect propriety of the execution is all of a piece with the genuineness of the ballad.

The cursing of the withy in the last stanza of all may be of some importance, but it seems to me more probably an afterthought and a tag. To my ear it does not ring quite true, though I am willing to be convinced that it is not an addition. The opportunity for explanation was too good a one to be lost, wherefore some singer of the ballad proceeded to explain the nature of the withy by the natural impatience of the Child.

#### VERSIONS OF THE THIEF AND THE MOONBEAM.<sup>2</sup>

Arabian. *Kalila and Dimna*, trans. Knatchbull, p. 69.

*Bidpai*, trans. Wolff, p. xxxix.

Syriac. Ed. G. Bickell, *Kalilag und Damnag*, 1876.

<sup>1</sup> *Work cited*, vi, 249. Both references I owe to the kindness of Dr. Donald C. Stuart, of Princeton.

<sup>2</sup> I give this list as being of possible use, though it is neither complete nor in every respect accurate. Many of the references, culled largely from Benfey and Oesterley, I have been unable to verify.

*From Arabian.*

Greek (by Simeon Seth). Ed. Stark, *Specimen Sapientiae Indorum Veterum*, 1697.

Persian (Iyâr-i-Danish). See Malcolm, *Sketches of Persia*, I, 144.

Hebrew. Ed. J. Derenbourg, *Deux versions hébraïques du livre de Kalîlâh et Dimndh* (Bibl. de l'École des Hautes Études, 49), 1881.

Spanish (by Alphonse le Sage). *Calila é Dymna*, chap. 2, ed. Pascual de Gayangos, in *Escritores en prosa anteriores al siglo XV* (Bibl. de autores españoles), 1860, pp. 15 f.

*From Greek.*

Possinus, *Specimen Sapientiae Indorum Veterum* (appended to *Observationes Pachymerianas*), 1666, p. 558.

*From Hebrew.*

John of Capua, *Directorium Humane Vitae*, cap. i, ed. J. Derenbourg, *Johannis de Capua Directorium Humanae Vitae* (Bibl. de l'École des Hautes Études, 72), 1887, pp. 24, 25; L. Hervieux, *Les fabulistes latins*, 1899, v, 98-100.

*From Spanish.*

*El libro de los enzeñplos*, no. vii, ed. Pascual de Gayangos, *Escritores*, etc., p. 449.

Raymond de Béziers. See under John of Capua.

*From John of Capua.*

Baldo, Ed. Hervieux, v, 344, no. vi.

Raymond de Béziers. Ed. Hervieux, v, 425, cap. iii; du Méril, *Poésies inédites*, p. 222.

Doni, *La Moral Filosofia de Doni*, 1552, p. 17.

Petrus Alphonsus, *Disciplina Clericalis*, cap. xxv. Ed V. Schmidt, I, 149.

*From Petrus Alphonsus.*

*Gesta Romanorum*, cap. 136. Ed. Oesterley, 1872, p. 490.

Vincent of Beauvais (ascribed), *Speculum Morale*, 3, 6, 2.

*Chastoïement*. Ed. Le Grand d'Aussy, *Fabliaux*, 1799, II, 409; Barbazan, *Fabliaux*, II, 148; Méon, *Fabliaux et contes*, 1808, II, 148.

*Unclassified.*

Wright, *Selections of Latin Stories*, p. 24.

Bromyard, *Summa Praedicatorum*, S, 3, 14.

Hans Sachs, ed. 1579, v, 376.

Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*. Ed. Oesterley, 1866 (Bibl. des litt. Ver. in Stuttgart, 85), no. 628, p. 345.

Geiler, *Narrenschiff*, 20.